Climate change is having an enormous impact on our world, impacting on the health and wellbeing and rights of millions of people.

The impact of climate change falls more heavily on people in vulnerable situations, owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status, national or social origin, birth or other status and disability.[1]

Older people are vulnerable to climate-related harms such as the increasing spread of vector-borne diseases, heat stress, and the increasing frequency and intensity of sudden- and slow-onset disasters which can impact their physical and mental health and wellbeing.[2]

Many older people care about the issue of climate change. In a 2023 COTA survey[3], climate change was a rated as an issue of high concern, ranking behind cost of living and health care and ahead of a range of other issues.

System-wide policy responses (across the health system, aged care services, emergency services, and other social services) are necessary to mitigate the risks posed and their interaction with population ageing.

COTA Australia:

- Recognises the significance and impact of climate change on all Australians and our responsibility for the environmental legacy our generation is leaving for future generations.
- Believes that Australia must be part of the global effort to take effective action on climate change. Unless Australia and other countries can strengthen their efforts to reduce carbon emissions, vulnerable members of the community, in particular children and older people will increasingly suffer the adverse impacts (including fatalities) from weather extremes such as heat waves, floods and bushfires.
- Supports the transition to a low carbon economy to reduce carbon emissions and the need to consider its impact on vulnerable groups, including older people, in all policy areas including housing, health, income security, transport, energy and daily living.
- Believes it is the responsibility of governments at all levels, to reduce carbon emissions, mitigate the effects of climate change and support older Australians to prepare for and adjust to a changing climate and economy in both the short and long term.

[1] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (UNHRC), The impact of climate change on the rights of older persons https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/impact-climate-change-rights-older-persons
[2] UNHRC, The impact of climate change on the rights of older persons
[3] SEC Newgate, COTA State of the Older Nation 2023